

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 TRSE-00 AID-05 FDRE-00 ACDA-12
/112 W

-----040197 131318Z /72

R 131007Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5522
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 2133

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SREF, BM, BG
SUBJECT: BURMESE-BENGALI TALKS ON CHITTAGONIAN/ARAKAN
DISPLACED PERSONS

SUMMARY: TALKS BETWEEN THE GUB AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH CONCLUDED IN RANGOON ON JUNE 10 WITHOUT
AGREEMENT. ACCORDING TO BURMESE SOURCES, THE BENGALIS CONTINUED
THEIR DEMAND THAT THE BURMESE PERMIT THE RETURN OF ALL DISPLACED
PERSONS, WITHOUT GUARANTEEING THAT THOSE FOUND INELIGIBLE FOR
CONTINUED RESIDENCE IN BURMA WOULD BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO
BANGLADESH. THE BURMESE REPORTEDLY OFFERED TO PERMIT THE RETURN
OF THOSE WITH LEGAL RIGHT TO RESIDE IN BURMA AS WELL AS AN
UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF THOSE WHO COULD ESTABLISH A LENGTHY PAST
RESIDENCY--LEGAL OR ILLEGAL--IN BURMA, AND ALSO SOUGHT REPLACEMENT
OF BORDER MARKERS AND BORDER DEMARCATION. THE BENGALI AMBASSADOR
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IS REPORTED TO HAVE MADE VEILED THREATS TO BURMESE NEWSMEN ON
POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES TO BURMA ON THIS ISSUE; PRESIDENT NE WIN
REPORTEDLY PRESSED FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS, TO BE HELD IN DACCA.
END SUMMARY

1. A NINE-MEMBER DELEGATION FROM BANGLADESH LED BY FOREIGN
SECRETARY TABARAK HUSSAIN VISIED BURMA FROM JUNE 6 TO 10 FOR

DISCUSSIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF CHITTAGONIANS WHO HAVE RECENTLY
CROSSED INTO BANGLADESH FROM BURMA'S ARAKAN PROVINCE. THE
BENGALI DELEGATION HELD THREE DAYS OF DISCUSSIONS WITH BURMESE
REPRESENTATIVES LED BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS U TIN
OHN, AND CALLED ON PRESIDENT NE WIN FOLLOWING THE FORMAL
DISCUSSIONS.

2. THE DISCUSSIONS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INCONCLUSIVE. THE GOVERN-
MENT CONTROLLED BURMESE PRESS REPORTEDLY MERELY THAT "POSITIVE
PROPOSALS WERE MADE BY THE BURMESE SIDE ON THE SOLUTION OF THE
IMMIGRATION PROBLEM...", "THAT DISCUSSIONS ON THE MEMORANDUM OF
UNDERSTANDING ON THE GROUND RULES TO BE AGREED BETWEEN THE TWO
COUNTRIES WERE ALSO GENERALLY ENCOURAGING," AND THAT THE BURMESE
SIDE PROPOSED STEPS TO CLARIFY THE BENGALI-BURMESE BORDER.

3. SOURCES CLOSE TO THE GUB REPORT THAT THE BENGALI DELEGATION
PRESSED FOR PERMISSION FOR ALL RECENT DEPARTEES FROM BURMA TO
RETURN, AND THAT ANY SCRUTINY OF INDIVIDUALS TO DETERMINE
THEIR RIGHT TO RESIDE IN BURMA SHOULD TAKE PLACE ONLY AFTER THEIR
RETURN, BUT DID NOT OFFER ASSURANCES THAT THOSE FOUND INELIGIBLE TO
REMAIN IN BURMA WOULD BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO BANGLADESH. THE
BENGALIS NOTED THAT UNDER BDG LAW, PERSONS RESIDENT IN BURMA PRIOR
TO 1972 COULD NOT BE BANGLADESHI CITIZENS.

4. ACCORDING TO THESE SOURCES, THE BURMESE OFFERED TO PERMIT
LEGAL RESIDENTS OF BURMA TO RETURN, AS WELL AS TO ALLOW AN
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UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF PERSONS WITH LONG RESIDENCE IN BURMA (EVEN
WITHOUT PERMISSION) TO RETURN. SCRUTINY OF INDIVIDUALS MUST,
HOWEVER, TAKE PLACE IN BANGLADESH, AND BURMESE RESIDENCE AND
VILLAGE RECORDS WOULD BE THE BASIS FOR ANY SUCH EXAMINATION.

5. ONE SOURCE, A JOURNALIST, SAID THAT THE BANGLADESHI
AMBASSADOR TO BURMA, IN CONVERSATION WITH JOURNALISTS, MADE
VEILED THREATS AS TO BURMA'S PROSPECTS WERE THE DISPLACED
CHITTAGONIANS TO BE KEPT IN REFUGEE CAMPS AND A PALESTINE-LIKE
SITUATION BE PERMITTED (OR ENCOURAGED) TO DEVELOP, AND
HINTED ABOUT CONTINUED SUPPLY OF ARMS BY THIRD PARTIES
(PRESUMABLY MUSLIM COUNTRIES). THE BURMESE REPORTEDLY IN RESPONSE
NOTED THAT BURMA HAS PUT UP WITH INSURGENCIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE
AND ONE MORE WOULD NOT MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE.

6. THE BURMESE REPORTEDLY FEARED THE BENGALIS WOULD WELCOME A
STALEMATE IN THE DISCUSSIONS AS AN EXCUSE TO CLAIM A BREAKDOWN
IN NEGOTIATIONS AND UNLEASH FURTHER PROPAGANDA ATTACKS UPON THE
DELEGATIONS'S RETURN; PRESIDENT NE WIN IS REPORTEDLY TO HAVE
DELIBERATELY BUT CASUALLY PUSHED FOR FURTHER TALKS BY NOTING,
DURING THE CALL ON HIM, THAT BURMA WOULD CONTINUE TO NEGOTIATE
ON THIS ISSUE AND THAT HE WOULD SEND A BURMESE DELEGATION TO

DACCA IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE BENGALI AMBASSADOR REPORTEDLY
CONFIRMED TO JOURNALISTS THAT FUTURE TALKS WOULD BE HELD IN DACCA
AT AN UNSPECIFIED DATE, ALTHOUGH THE GUB HAS PROVIDED NO PUBLIC
CONFIRMATION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 2133

7. COMMENT: THE BURMESE PROPOSALS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INTENDED
TO SHOW SOME WILLINGNESS TO TAKE BACK SOME OF THE CHITTAGONIANS
WHO FLED FROM THE ARAKAN AND TO PROVIDE A BASIS FOR THE CONTINUA-
TION OF THE DIPLOMATIC PROCESS. THE BURMESE HAVE OBVIOUSLY
REGARDED BENGALI BEHAVIOR ON THIS QUESTION FROM THE BEGINNING
AS AN OVERREACTION, PERHAPS A DELIBERATE OVERREACTION.

8. THE BURMESE ARE DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF BDG INTENTIONS TOWARDS
THE ARAKAN STATE. (THE GUB STILL PROBABLY HAS IN MIND, FOR
EXAMPLE, THE INVOLVEMENT OF BANGLADESH EMBASSY MILITARY ATTACHE
WITH ARAKANESE DISSIDENTS, WHICH THEY DISCOVERED IN 1977.) THEY
MAINTAIN THAT THE MASS EXODUS OF REFUGEES WAS NOT WARRANTED BY
THEIR LIMITED IMMIGRATION OPERATIONS (AND INDEED THE ATROCITY
REPORTS COMING FROM BANGLADESH ARE TOTALLY UNSUPPORTED BY EVEN
RUMORS IN RANGOON, AND THIS TOWN IS NOT WITHOUT OPPONENTS OF THE
PRESENT REGIME). IF THE GUB IS OPERATING FROM THE SAME INFORMATION
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THAT HAS COME TO US FROM THE FEW OUTSIDE OBSERVERS THAT HAVE VISITED THE ARAKAN (I.E., THAT THE SCOPE OF THE EXODUS IN LARGE PART RESULTS FROM FEAR OF IMMIGRATION CHECKS RATHER THAN HAVING ENCOUNTERED GUB TROOPS AND POLICE, AND THAT THIS FEAR IS FUELED BY RELIGIOUS, COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL GROUPS, RESULTING IN PANIC AND MASS UPHEAVALS OF ENTIRE COMMUNITIES) THEN DELAY BOTH TO LET THE DUST SETTLE AND TO DETERMINE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE BDG IS POLITICALLY INVOLVED IN THESE COMMUNAL TENSIONS WOULD, IN THE GUB VIEW, BE APPROPRIATE.
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